

Blu-Ray Review: Stunning ‘The Prisoner’ Still Holds Viewer Interest Captive

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on November 13, 2009 - 1:09pm

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CHICAGO – Patrick McGoochan was ready to quit. After playing secret agent John Drake in over eighty episodes of the British TV show “Danger Man” (known in the US as “Secret Agent”), McGoochan was clearly in need of a change. Luckily, his script editor George Markstein had a great idea up his sleeve. What if Drake suddenly resigned, and his employers wouldn’t let him go? What if they kidnapped Drake and sent him to a secret location where he couldn’t escape? Markstein was clearly inspired by the actual incidents during WWII where people were incarcerated and under constant surveillance in resort-like prisons. McGoochan loved the idea, and together they created one of the most astoundingly original and richly entertaining programs in television history in “The Prisoner,” recently released on Blu-Ray to coincide with the AMC remake starring Jim Caviezel and Ian McKellen.



Blu-Ray Rating: **5.0/5.0**

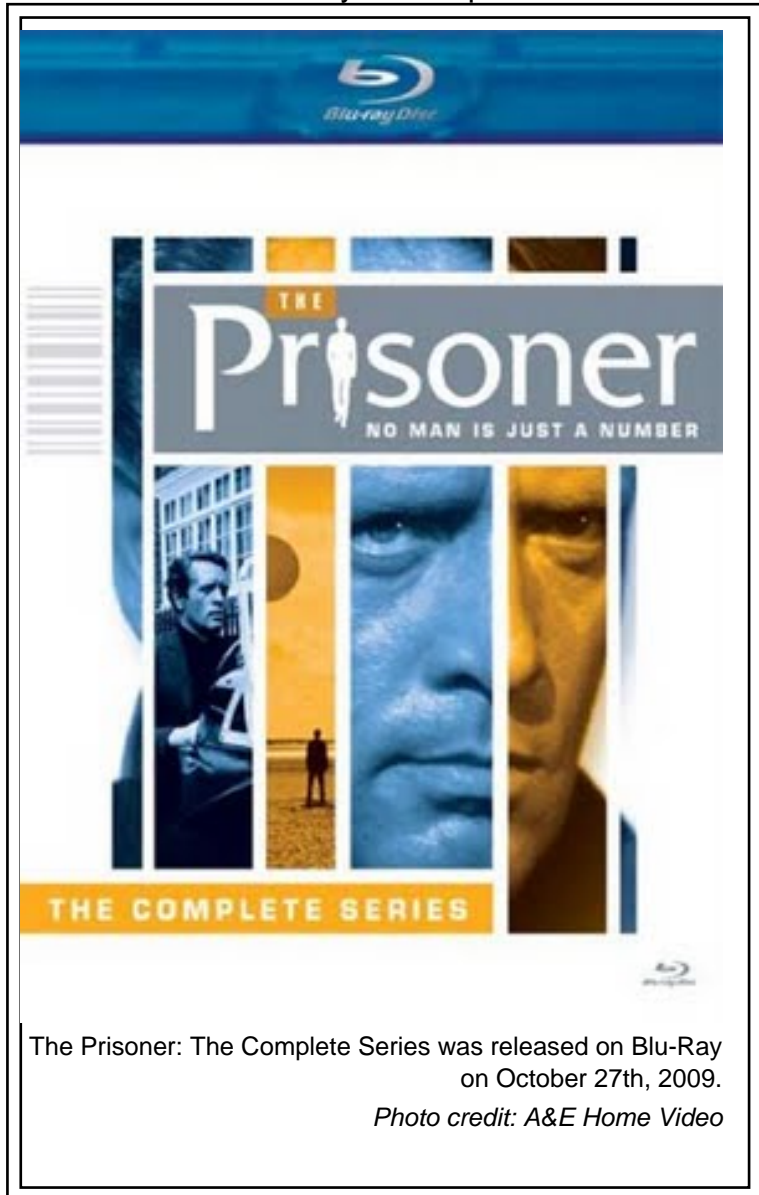
“The Prisoner” debuted in 1967, and ran for 17 hour-long episodes that altogether form a magnificent mini-series. McGoochan emerged as the driving creative force behind the production, serving as co-writer, executive producer and director (often under a pseudonym). But it’s his captivating lead performance, shifting between debonair grace and raw intensity, that made the show truly shine. His character is a recently resigned secret agent not unlike Drake, who awakens in the mysterious seaside community known as “the Village,” and is immediately assigned the name, “Number Six.” As he explores the benignly inviting landscape, where fellow prisoners attempt to live in oblivion of the powers that control them, the show both evokes the spirit of Ray Bradbury’s “Fahrenheit 451,” and foreshadows future science fiction parables such as “The Truman Show.”



The Prisoner: The Complete Series was released on Blu-Ray on October 27th, 2009.

Photo credit: A&E Home Video

This premise, worthy of a grand “Twilight Zone” story, would seem in danger of wearing thin after a few episodes, but the series never flags in its invention or ingenious social satire. Every episode finds a fresh stylistic and thematic approach to the material, as Number Six undergoes his epic journey to discover the identity of the Village’s chief authority figure, known as “Number One.” The ever-changing second-in-command, “Number Two,” informs our protagonist in the first episode that he is being held captive because of the information he possesses, and because of the inexplicable nature of his resignation. Thus, Number Six’s freedoms have been stripped away, though he is determined to find a way to escape back to London.



One of the show’s most arresting images is that of a looming circular rover that roars through the tranquil town and consumes unsuspecting prisoners. Every episode is jam-packed with twists and surprises, while milking its subtext (steeped in cold war paranoia) for all it’s worth. The exuberant music contains inspired riffs on various classic tunes, and the show’s explosive climax is ironically scored to The Beatles’ “All You Need Is Love.” The show’s consistent energy and exuberance makes every hour a pleasure, yet what primarily makes “The Prisoner” vital programming is its timely metaphor for an individual’s struggle against a powerful system of brainwashing, technologically-obsessed, dehumanizing conformity. This causes it to be an ideal subject for a remake, yet this new Blu-ray edition of the classic series further proves that AMC’s new version (premiering on Sunday, November 15th) has awfully big shoes to fill.

“The Prisoner: The Complete Series” is presented in its original 1.33:1 aspect ratio, with flawless picture and sound quality. Each of the 17 episodes comes equipped with newly mixed 5.1 surround sound, while seven of them include commentary (from various members of the production) offering perceptive musings on the show’s ever-burgeoning relevance in modern society. In addition to the four Blu-ray disc set is a DVD loaded with special features, including an excellent feature-length making-of documentary, “Don’t Knock Yourself Out,” and extended interviews with actor Peter Wyngarte and music editor Eric Mival. It also features original edits of the first two episodes, as well as extensive image and production paperwork archives.

‘The Prisoner: The Complete Series’ is released by A&E Home Video and stars Patrick McGoochan. It was written by George Markstein & Patrick McGoochan & David Tomblin & Anthony Skene & Terence Feely & Vincent Tilsley and directed by Pat Jackson & Patrick McGoochan & Don Chaffey & David Tomblin. It was released on October 27th, 2009. It is not rated.

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